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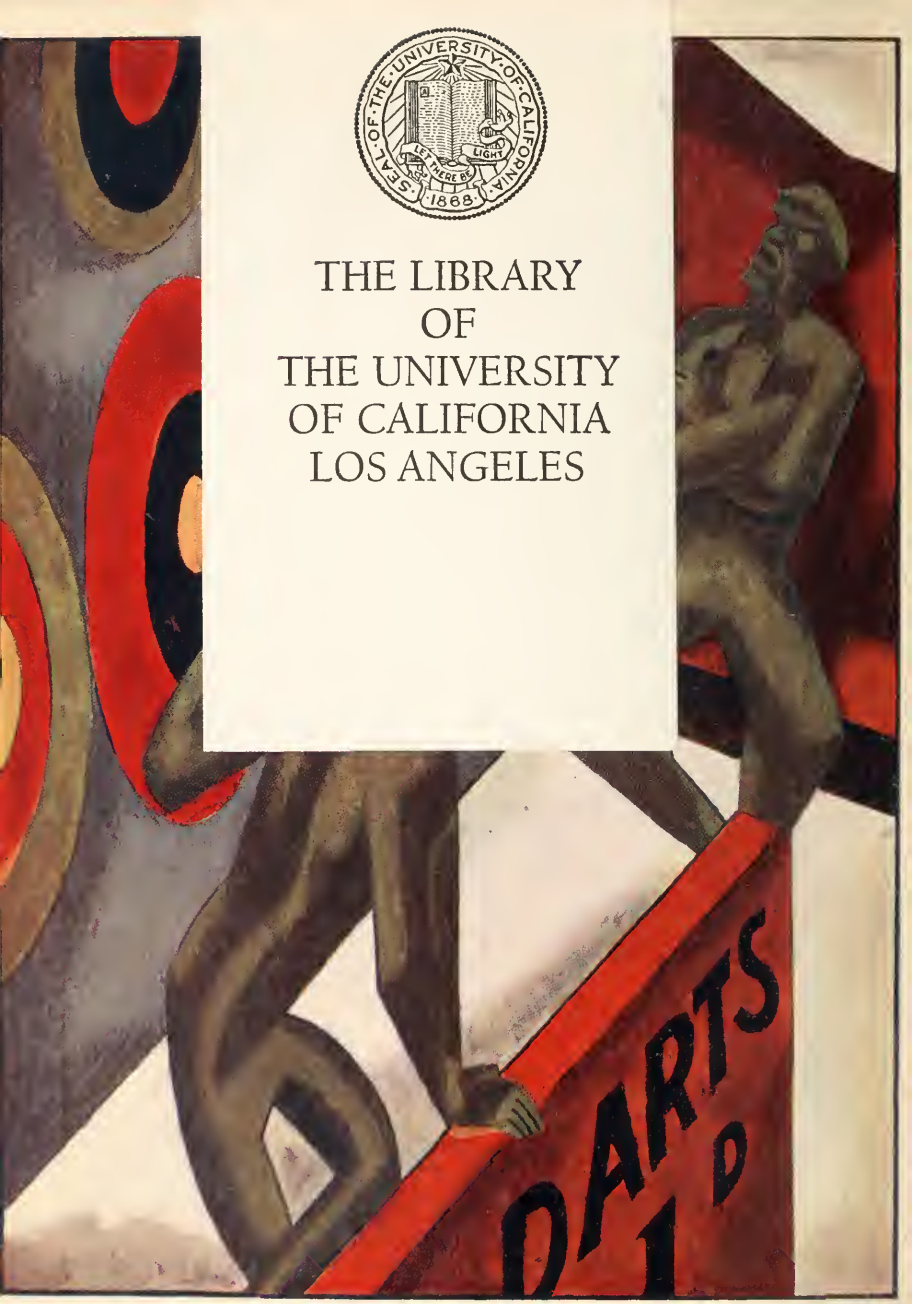

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VICIMUS
OLIVER BRETT

WHEELS, 1919

FOURTH CYCLE

EDITED BY EDITH SITWELL

1919
FOURTH CYCLE
WHEELS
OSBERT SITWELL
SHERARD VINES
ALDOUS HUXLEY
EDITH
SACHEVERELL SITWELL
WILFID OWEN
IRIS TREE
ARNOLD JAMES
ALVARO GUEVARA
OXFORD
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WE DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO THE MEMORY

OF

WILFRED OWEN, M.C.

DISCUS

Thanks are due to the Editors of *The Saturday Westminster Gazette*, *The Nation* and *The Coterie*, for permission to reprint certain of these poems.

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CORPSE-DAY.

July 19th, 1919.

DUSK floated up from the earth beneath,
Held in the arms of the evening wind
—The evening wind that softly creeps
Along the jasper-terraces,
To bear with it
The old, sad scent
Of midsummer, of trees and flowers,
Whose bell-shaped blossoms, shaken, torn
By the rough fingers of the day
Ring out their frail and honeyed notes.

* * *

Up from the earth there rose
Sounds of great triumph and rejoicing.

* *

Our Lord Jesus, the Son of Man,
Smiled
And leant over the ramparts of Heaven.
Beneath Him
Through the welling clouds of darkness
He could see
The swarming of mighty crowds.

Corpse-Day.

It was in the Christian Continent,
Especially,
That the people chanted
Hymns and pæans of joy.
But it seemed to Our Lord
That through the noisy cries of triumph
He could still detect
The bitter sobbing
—The continuous weeping of widows and children—
Which had haunted Him for so long,
Though He saw only
The bonfires,
The arches of triumph,
The processions,
And the fireworks
That soared up
Through the darkening sky,
To fall in showers of flame
Upon the citadel of Heaven.
As a rocket burst
There fell from it,
Screaming in horror,
Hundreds of men,
Twisted into the likeness of animals
—Writhing men
Without feet,

Corpse-Day.

Without legs,
Without arms,
Without faces— . . .

The earth-cities still rejoiced.
Old, fat men leant out to cheer
From bone-built palaces.
Gold flowed like blood
Through the streets;
Crowds became drunk
On liquor distilled from corpses.
And peering down
The Son of Man looked into the world;
He saw
That within the churches and the temples
His image had been set up;
But, from time to time,
Through twenty centuries,
The priests had touched up the countenance
So as to make war more easy
Or intimidate the people—
Until now the Face
Had become the Face of Moloch!
But the people did not notice
The change.
. . . And Jesus wept!

ENGLISH GOTHIC.

ABOVE the valley floats a fleet
Of white, small clouds. Like castenets
The corn-crakes clack; down in the street
Old ladies air their canine pets.

A woman, with a veil and flowers,
Grasps a canary in a cage,
Toils up the hotel steps. The towers
Of the Cathedral mutter rage.

With ragged beat and grumbling tone
They warn the people of the place
That soon they 'll find, before His Throne,
Their Maker, with a frowning face.

The souls of bishops, shut in stone
By masons, rest in quietude
As flies in amber. They atone
Each buzzing long-dead platitude.

English Gothic.

For lichen plants its golden flush
Now, where the gaiter should have bent;
With glossy wings the black crows brush
Carved mitres; caw in merriment.

Wings blacker than the verger's hat
Beat on the air. These birds must learn
Their preaching note by pecking at
The lips of those who, treading fern,

Ascend the steps to Heaven's height.
The willow herb, down by the wood
Flares out to mark the phœnix flight
Of God Apollo's car. Its hood

Singes the trees. The swans who float
—Wings whiter than the foam of sea—
Up the episcopal smooth moat,
Uncurl their necks to ring for tea.

At this sign, in the plump green close,
The Deans say grace. A hair pomade
Scents faded air. But still outside
Stone bishops scale a stone façade.

A thousand strong, church-bound, they look
Across shrill meadows — but to find
The cricket bat defeats the Book
—Matter triumphant over Mind!

English Gothic.

Wellington said Waterloo
Was won upon the playing-fields,
Which thought might comfort clergy who
Admire the virtues that rank yields.

But prelates of stone cannot relate
An Iron Duke's strong and silent words.
The knights in armour rest in state
Within, and grasp their marble swords.

Above, where flutter angel-wings
Caught in the organ's rolling loom,
Hang in the air, like jugglers rings,
Dim quatrefoils of coloured gloom.

Tall arches rise to imitate
The jaws of Jonah's whale. Up flows
The chant. Thin spinster's sibilate
Beneath the full-blown Gothic rose.

Pillars surge upward, break in spray
Upon the high and fretted roof;
But children scream outside—betray
The urging of a cloven hoof.

* * *

Tier-above-tier the Bishops stare
Away, away, above the hills.
Their faded eyes repel the glare
Of dying sun, till sunset fills

English Gothic.

Each pointed niche in which they stand
With glory of earth; humanity
Is spurned by one with upturned hand,
Who warns them all is vanity.

The swan beneath the sunset arch
Expands its wings, as if to fly.
A thousand saints upon the march
Glow in the water, and then die.

A man upon the hill can hear
The organ. Echoes he has found
That, having lost religious fear,
Are pagan; till the rushing sound

Clearly denotes Apollo's car,
That roars past moat and bridge and tree,
The Young God sighs. How far, how far,
Before the night shall set him free?

NOCTURNE.

THE brazen glory of the day is done;
Its trumpet flowers
Fold in their glowing petals:
All colour fades,
Flows into dusk.

* * *

But soon the silver bird of night
Flits from its nest of summer woods;
Soars upward
Into the breathless, dim, dome of heaven.
As the silver bird mounts higher,
The leaves of all the lofty trees
Are turned to frozen waterfalls
—Cool stalactites
That hang above our reach.
Until this rustling wind
Melts them
And coolness drips down upon us;
Then the bell-shaped turrets of the evening flowers
Flutter, and sigh,
Unsheathe their sun-bound scent,—

* * *

And we are free once more
To rest within the shuttered sweetness of the woods.

THE BETROTHAL OF PRIAPUS.

DARK water: the moonless side of the trees;
The Dog-Star sweating in the roses: mind
Heat-curdled to sheer flesh. For ease
And the sake of coolness, having dined,

I loose a button, wrench a stud.
We belch to the tune of drunk Moselle.
What a noise in the temples—hammering blood,
Shall we sit down? Are we altogether well?

"How weedily the river exhales!"
"Like the smell of caterpillar's dung."
"You too collected?" "When I was young,
But used no camphor; moth prevails

Over moths, you take me." Sounding close,
But God knows where, two landrails scrape
Nails on combs. Her hair is loose,
One tendril astray upon the nape

The Betrothal of Priapus.

Of a neck which star-revealed is white
Like an open-eyed tobacco-flower—
Frail thurible which fills the night
With the subtle intoxicating power

Of summer perfume. And you too—
Your scent intoxicates; the smell
Of clothes, of hair, the essence of you.
But for the ferments of Moselle,

I'd swoon in the languor of your perfume,
In the drowsed delicious contemplation
Of a neck seen palely through the gloom,
Another hideous eructation.—

And I wake, distressingly aware
That there are uglier things in life
Than perfumed stars and women's hair.—
Action, then action! Will you be my wife?

FRASCATI'S.

BUBBLE-BREASTED swells the dome
Of this my spiritual home,
From whose nave the chandelier,
Frozen Schafthausen, tumbles sheer.
We in the round balcony sit,
Lean o'er and look into the pit
Where feed the human bears beneath,
Champing with their gilded teeth.
What negroid holiday makes free
With such priapic revelry?
What songs? What gongs? What nameless rites?
What gods like wooden stalagmites?
What reeking steam of kidney pie?
What blasts of Bantu melody?
Ragtime . . . but when the wearied band
Swoons to a waltz, I take her hand
And there we sit in blissful calm,
Quietly sweating palm to palm.

VERREY'S.

HERE, every winter's night at eight,
Epicurus lies in state,
Two candles at his head and two
Candles at his feet. A few
Choice spirits watch beneath the vault
Of his dim chapel, where default
Of music fills the pregnant air
With subtler requiem and prayer
Than ever an organ wrought with notes
Spouted from its tubal throats.
Black Ethiopia's holy child,
The cradled bottle, breathes its mild
Meek spirit on the ravished nose,
The palate and the tongue of those
Who piously partake with me
Of this funereal agape.

TOPIARY.

FAILING sometimes to understand
Why there are folk whose flesh should seem
Like carrion puffed with noisome steam,
Fly-blown to the eye that looks on it,
Fly-blown to the touch of a hand;
Why there are men without any legs,
Whizzing along on little trollies,
With long, long arms like apes:
Failing to see why God the Topiarist
Should train and carve and twist
Men's bodies into such fantastic shapes:
Yes, failing to see the point of it all, I sometimes wish
That I were a fabulous thing in a fool's mind,
Or, at the ocean bottom, in a world that is deaf and blind,
Very remote and happy, a great goggling fish.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

LOVE SONG.

DEAR absurd child,—too dear to my cost I've found—
God made your soul for pleasure, not for use:
It cleaves no way, but angled broad, obtuse
Impinges with a slabby-bellied sound
Full upon life, and on the rind of things
Rubs its sleek self and utters purr and snore
And all the gamut of satisfied murmurings,
Content with that, nor wishes anything more.

A happy infant, daubed to the eyes in juice
Of peaches that flush bloody at the core,
Naked you bask upon a south-sea shore,
While o'er your tumbling bosom the hair floats loose.

The wild flowers bloom and die; the heavens go round
With the song of wheeling planetary rings:
You wriggle in the sun; each moment brings
Its freight for you; in all things pleasures abound.

You taste and smile, then this for the next pass over;
And there's no future for you and no past,
And when, absurdly, death arrives at last,
'Twill please you awhile to kiss your latest lover.

COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUE.

WE judge by appearance merely:
If I can't think strangely, I can at least look queerly.
So I grew the hair so long on my head
That my mother wouldn't know me,
Till a woman in a night-club said,
As I was passing by,
"Hullo, here comes Salome. . . ."

I looked in the dirty gilt-edged glass,
And, oh Salome; there I was—
Positively jewelled, half a vampire,
With the soul in my eyes hanging dizzily
Like the gatherer of proverbial samphire
Over the brink of the crag of sense,

Looking down from perilous eminence
Into a gulf of windy night.
And there's straw in my tempestuous hair,
And I'm not a poet: but never despair!
I'll madly live the poems I shall never write.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

THE REEF.

MY green aquarium of phantom fish,
Goggling in on me through the misty panes;
My rotting leaves and fields spongy with rains;
My few clear quiet autumn days—I wish

I could leave all, clearness and mistiness;
Sodden or goldenly crystal, all too still.
Yes, and I too rot with the leaves that fill
The hollows in the woods; I am grown less

Than human, listless, aimless as the green
Idiot fishes of my aquarium,
Who loiter down their dim tunnels and come
And look at me and drift away, nought seen

Or understand, but only glazedly
Reflected. Upwards, upwards through the shadows,
Through the lush sponginess of deep-sea meadows
Where hare-lipped monsters batten, let me ply

Winged fins, bursting this matrix dark to find
Jewels and movement, mintage of sunlight
Scattered largely by the profuse wind,
And gulfs of blue brightness, too deep for sight.

The Reef.

Free, newly born, on roads of music and air
Speeding and singing, I shall seek the place
Where all the shining threads of water race,
Drawn in green ropes and foamy meshes. There,

On the red fretted ramparts of a tower
Of coral rooted in the depths, shall break
An endless sequence of joy and speed and power:
Green shall shatter to foam; flake with white flake

Shall create an instant's shining constellation
Upon the blue; and all the air shall be
Full of a million wings that swift and free
Laugh in the sun, all power and strong elation.

Yes, I shall seek that reef, which is beyond
All isles however magically sleeping
In tideless seas, uncharted and unconned
Save by blind eyes: beyond the laughter and weeping

That brood like a cloud over the lands of men.
Movement, passion of colour and pure wings,
Curving to cut like knives—these are the things
I search for:—passion beyond the ken

Of our foiled violences, and more swift
Than any blow which man aims against time,
The invulnerable, motion that shall rift
All dimness with the lightning of a rhyme.

Or note, or colour. And the body shall be
Quick as the mind; and soul shall find release
From bondage to brute things; and joyously
Soul, will and body, in the strength of triune peace,

Shall live the perfect grace of power unwasted;
And love consummate, marvellously blending
Passion and reverence in a single spring
Of quickening force, till now never yet tasted,

But ever ceaselessly thirsted for, shall crown
The new life with its ageless starry fire.
I go to seek that reef far down, far down
Below the edge of every day's desire,

Beyond the magical islands, where of old
I was content, dreaming, to give the lie
To misery. They were all strong and bold
That thither came; and shall I dare to try?

SERENADE.

(From "Bird Actors.")

SIGH soft, sigh softly,
rain-thrilled leaves!
Let not your careless hands
Stem the gold wind!
Let not your green sleeves
Swim in its breath
As water flowing!
Lest your thin hands
Make gurgle down the crystal hills
The gaudy sun's pavilions
Whence he distils the showered scents
Whose value all true turtles croon
beneath their swinging palaces.

* *

Sing low, then, turtles,
Sigh soft, swift wind,
And fountains, cease your flutings—
Melulla, now
lean on your balcony! look down!
My strings shall sing.

THE ITALIAN AIR:

IN among the apple trees
And on their echoing golden roofs,
A singing shower rides on the breeze,
And prints the grass with crystal hoofs.

The sighing music faints and fails
Among the far-off feathered boughs,
The birds fold up their painted sails;
But voices sound, until they rouse

The sleeping birds and silent leaves;
And now a harp once more resounds,
To utter what her heart believes
And what her trembling sense confounds.

The daring loudness wakes the house
That sleeps beneath the staring sun,
The birds awake: the cattle browse:
The page jumps down, begins to run

Across the flower-beds: now there rings
Another voice of sterner kind,
The harp sounds still; Figaro sings
To ease his master's troubled mind.

MRS. H....., OR A LADY FROM BABEL.

"Sprechen sie Deutsch? Parley-vous Français?
Parlate Italiano? Dearest Child!"

MRS. H. would float the words
As jewels from her sunshade,
Which to my infant eyes
Seemed as the fountain of all frankincense.
Beneath the twittering shadow
She leaned out, looking in one's eyes,
Her body perfectly enmeshed
Beneath the clinging scales of gold,
And all her landau
Filled with the falling jewels—
The melting of the million bells
Set ringing when the wind breathes
And the blue spaces of the sky
Are filled with shaking leaves—
Divine wisdom as a freehold gift
From black-gloved hands—
The feast of untold tongues!

Mrs. H....., or a Lady from Babel.

On a bridge one evening
From behind the nearest house
The sunset air came suddenly alive with sound,
The throbbing from a mandoline fell forth
As the long lines of water when a boat floats by.
—This ended, she was asked for coppers
In Italian.

"Coachman, drive on!
Mes meilleurs sentiments à maman,
Mes meilleurs. . . ."

VALSE ESTUDIANTINA.

A WALL of cactus guards the virgin sound
Dripping through the sword-edged leaves
The wayward milking
Of your mental stalactites
On the strung bells of music,
Arrests the moment,
Petrifies the air.

As you trudge along the path
Laid down before you,
Counting all the trees
Remembering the turnings
Instead of resting on the wooden seats
You lie among the thistles in the sun.
Your poor jangle spreads along the street,
Filtering the voices of the passer-by,
Embroidering the singing in the lines of wire,
And masking as with histrionic aim
The bird-sound of long-distance messages.

Valse Estudiantina.

Now with a practised hand
The music-master will release the waltz
That makes a difference in our lives.
With one hand on the railing
To feel the rings of sound,
One might emphasise the vision—

Some are sitting under flame-touched trees
Where the generous sun
Has run the fierce green plumes
Set quivering on the harp-strings of the boughs,
Has run them to a fine fire of gold,
Has quickened them,
As islands cut the currents of the sea,
To the full spun colour
Of the floating jewels
That part the wind's gold hair,
And fill the ultimate sea
With all its canopy of clouds,
And tents of quick blue hills
With the new message of their incense-cells.

Beneath these trees
The suffocated crowd extends
Its troubled surface,
Till toying with another figured shape
The extreme couples lie among the grass.

Valse Estudiantina.

This tune brings evening ringing down
On the well-bedeckèd windows of the day,
And rising on their tired feet,
Running the fingers through their flower-decked hair
They leave the vast arena of the band
Moving on the tight-rope of the tune.

Ring out, ring out now, ring out now,
The blare of your hundred brass trumpets
Shake the leaves down, shake the leaves down,
Make the clouds dance like flowers in the wind.

In the darkening room
You sit beside the piano
Where the music-master
Stretches his shadow.
As he moves his hands,
In your mind ringing on its meals,
The rightful tunes to play
Are the sweet songs of birds,
The yaps of dogs,
Hot water tapping on the leaden pipes,—
As a final consummation
Father arriving by the evening train.

I.

NOW the gold goes trickling out of the sunset,
Leaving blue and the deep slumbering red:
(Beautiful, calm in accomplishment, but dead).

Dark green leaves dance over the deepening sky
And silver starlight, dreamingly tranquil
(But still as Death, now the gold has gone, so still)

The mystic starlight peeps, and the tides are running.
And the little wind sings with musical breath
(In all that music I feel the pulse of Death).

Now you have left me, maybe but for a day
(I think your life like the sunset gold sinking
Down strange dark seas, flows home to the sunrise spring).

Now you are gone from me, all is fair and calm:
The beautiful trees wave dark against blue dark.
(But the gold is gone . . .) From the garden shadows, hark

A bird of night, showering starry song
Surely in praise of death. Away 'tis borne,
Away, away, to be merged in songs of morn.

II.

NOW my white-winged dreams do rove
Like silver ocean-doves, that soar
In circling flights and falls, above
A wave-lapped shore.

Pale turquoise hues o'erspread the skies:
White clouds, voyaging overhead
In marmoreal serenities
Are portraited.

Tall ships majestically glide
With scarce a stirring of sea-spray
Nor scarce a breath to swell their pride
Of sail array . . .

And yet those jewelled deeps do hold
Far beyond sight or any sound
Pale gleaming relics of the drowned
Ribs that of old

II.

Throbbed to the tune of hopes and fears
And danced with the desire of fame:
Cheeks that have felt the kiss of tears,
The lash of shame.

From the dim bosom of the seas
Their wide and solemn resting-place
Floats sometimes to the still surface
Pale dust of these.

And wistfully the sun looks down
On that he once beheld so fair
In seaweed tangles on the air
Carelessly thrown.

My dreams do silver wings outspread,
Nor wing their course less joyously
Though scattered on the calm may be
Dust of the dead.

III.

MY lips were blossoming flowers of bitterness
My strainèd heartstrings sly-fingered Despair
Plucked sinisterly, to a low swift air
Of gipsy laughter. In a night starless
My soul fled blindly through the wilderness,
Till clouds being rent, the moon with leer and flare
Let dangle through the cracks her silvery hair—
A shining harlot, drunk with loneliness.

And all the while a still and secret place
Of pools and greenery and swinging flowers
Distilled a perfumed peace for one within.
His countenance the characters of sin
Score not, nor feverish mirth leaves any trace,
Nor tears, upon his calm inviolate hours.

Two Translations from the Spanish of Quevedo, by Alvaro de Guevara.

I.

CORDOVA.

GREAT squares are here, and streets narrow,
A rich bishop, and merchants, and poor,

* * *

Houses without waists, men to waste,
Rooms hung over with pins,
A pale Bacchus, a bony Venus,
With many a Judas and Peter; a few cocks.
Pins and needles running to boredom,
A bridge that there is none to repair,
A St. Paul amongst many St. Benedicts,
A foolish mob, a discreet Gongora—
This found I in Cordova; who would find more
May continue this poem.

II.

TO THE MOSQUITO OF THE LITTLE TRUMPET.

MINSTREL of the rash and stings,
Postillon mosquito, barber fly ;
You have made my pate a sieve,
And have demolished my face with your onslaught.
Little trumpet of the blows and buffets,
You come armed with a lance against my skin,
Flea cupid, trumpeting bug,
You fly with sharp itchings.
Why warn me, if you wish to sting me ?
For you give pain to those you sing to.

* * *

You fly, you sting, and you frighten,
And you learn from care and the women
To spoil sleep amongst the blankets.

ELDERS.

YOU preach to me of laws, you tie my limbs
With rights and wrongs and arguments of good,
You choke my songs and fill my mouth with hymns,
You stop my heart and turn it into wood.

I serve not God, but make my idol fair
From clay of brown earth, painted bright with blood,
Dressed in sweet flesh and wonder of wild hair
By Beauty's fingers to her changing mood.

The long line of the sea, the straight horizon,
The toss of flowers, the prance of milky feet,
And moonlight clear as glass my great religion,
And sunrise falling on the quiet street.

The coloured crowd, the unrestrained, the gay,
And lovers in the secret sheets of nights
Trembling like instruments of music, till the day
Stands marvelling at their sleeping bodies white.

Elders.

Age creeps upon your tired little faces
Beneath each black umbrella sly and slow,
Proud in the unimportance of your places
You sit in twilight prophesying woe.

So dim and false and grey, take my compassion,
I from my pageant golden as the day
Pity your littleness from all my passion,
Leave you my sins to weep and whine away!

THE COMPLEX LIFE.

I KNOW it to be true that those who live
As do the grasses and the lilies of the field
Receiving joy from Heaven, sweetly yield
Their joy to Earth, and taking Beauty, give.

But we are gathered for the looms of Fate
That Time with ever-turning multiplying wheels
Spins into complex patterns and conceals
His huge invention with forms intricate.

Each generation blindly fills the plan,
A sorry muddle or an inspiration of God;
With many processes from out the sod,
The Earth and Heaven are mingled and made man.

We must be tired and sleepless, gaily sad,
Frothing like waves in clamorous confusion,
A chemistry of subtle interfusion,
Experiments of genius that the ignorant call mad.

The Complex Life.

We spell the crimes of our unruly days,
We see a fabled Arcady in our mind,
We crave perfection that we may not find
Time laughs within the clock and Destiny plays.

You peasants and you hermits, simple livers!
So picturesquely pure, all unconcerned
While we give up our bodies to be burned,
And dredge for treasure in the muddy rivers.

We drink and die and sell ourselves for power,
We hunt with treacherous steps and stealthy knife,
We make a gaudy havoc of our life
And live a thousand ages in an hour.

Our lives are spoilt by introspective guile,
We vivisect our souls with elaborate tools,
We dance in couples to the tune of fools,
And dream of harassed continents the while.

Subconscious visions hold us and we fashion
Delirious verses, tortured statues, spasms of paint,
Make cryptic perorations of complaint,
Inverted religion, and perverted passion.

The Complex Life.

All against all, a vast conspiracy,
We blindly stab the hearts that wish us well,
We feast ourselves within a gilded Hell
Our patriotism is varnished piracy.

But since we are children of this age,
And must in curious ways discover salvation
I will not quit my muddled generation,
But ever plead for Beauty in this rage.

Although I know that Nature's bounty yields
Unto simplicity a beautiful content,
Only when battle breaks me and my strength is spent
Will I give back my body to the fields.

REMORSE.

WHAT were you doing in the colour, in the dangerous
brilliancy,
The crowding people dyed with violent moods?
You have tasted poison from the little fluted glasses,
And loved your red reflection in the mirror,
And heard your songs in whispers round the room,
And flattery, a thousand tangling ribbons
Catching, alluring, flung down from the galleries—
Dawn is here, and your soul goes running away down the
street,
The road that leads to whiteness and a purity of hope—
Morning, the remorseful, the ghostly, the wonder-eyed,
Treading with wistful feet among the rubbish we have
heaped—
And you, half broken, cast out of night into the gutter,
Flowing with it down the street to the whiteness of the sea.

SOUL'S AVARICE.

I CAUGHT a golden mood in the cobwebs of a gloomy day—
And it is dead—
In the shelves and cupboards of the soul
The embalmed corpses of many fancies are threaded,—
Moths of blind pilgrimage toward
A taper's light.—
Dragon flies like gaudy dreamers,
Lethargic bumble bees,
Wasps streaked with venom and fear
And nonchalant butterflies
Varied in beautiful vanities.—
O spider zealot
With invisible loom
And silent shuttle,
Weaving thy intricate snares
Till some swift glittering moment
Shall tremble in the meshes thou hast spread—
Emotion's blood
To splash the apathy with fire
And gorge thy emptiness!

WANDERLUST.

I FEEL in me a manifold desire
From many lands and times and clamouring peoples,
And I the Queen
Of crowding vagabonds,
Ghosts of lost years in seeming fancy dress,
With pathos of torn laces
And broken swords;
Cut-throats and kings and poets
In visions wild, not knowing
What I was.
In me no end
Even where the last content
Clasps on my head a crown
Of shining endurance—
I slip from all my robes
Into the rags of a tattered romance;
The stars crowd at the window,
Their jealous destiny
Raps at the door—
They bob and wink and leer
And I must leave the lamplight for the road
To keep strange company.
Farewell and Hail!

CHANGING MIRRORS.

I SEE myself in many different dresses,
In many moods, and many different places;
All gold amid the grey where solemn faces
Are silence to my mirth—a flame that blesses
From yellow lamp the darkness which oppresses . . .
Or mid the dancers in their trivial laces
Aloof, as in the ring a lion paces,
Disdainful of their slander or caresses.
I see myself the child of many races,
Poisoners, martyrs, harlots and princesses;
Within my soul a thousand weary traces
Of pain and joy and passionate excesses—
Eternal beauty that our brief life chases
With snatch of desperate hands and dying tresses.

LAMP-POSTS.

THE eternal flame of laughter and desire
Breaks the long darkness with a little glance,
Till all the gloom is radiant in a dance
Of yellow hopefulness, reflecting fire
That dreams from Heaven's lamps as we aspire
Sadly toward their jubilance—Romance
Of faery glitter in the streets of chance—
Those beacon-trees that blossom from the mire
Within the fog of our despairing gloom;
In the glum alleys, down the haunted night
Through tunnelling of subterranean doom,
Among the grovelling shadows, kingly bright,
They bear their coronets of golden bloom
To front our anguish with their brave delight.

MEMORY.

FROM far away the lost adventures gleam,
The print of childhood's feet that dance and run,
The love of her who showed me to the sun
In triumph of creation, who did seem
With vivid spirit like a rainbow stream
To paint the shells, young blossoms, one by one;
Each strange and delicate toy, whose hands have spun
The woven cloth of wonder like a dream. . . .
The row of soldiered books, authority
Sharp as the scales I strummed upon the keys,
The priest who damned the things I dared not praise,
Rebellion, love made sad by mystery—
And like a firefly through the twilit trees
Romance, the golden play-boy of my days.

DISENCHANTMENT.

SILENCE—
Somewhere on earth
There is a purpose that I miss or have forgotten.
The trees stand bolt upright
Like roofless pillars of a broken temple,
There is a purpose in Heaven,
But for me
Nothing.

THE SHOW.

MY soul looked down from a vague height with Death,
As unremembering how I rose or why,
And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,
Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,
And fitted with great pocks and scabs of plaques.

Across its beard, that horror of harsh wire,
There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled.
It seemed they pushed themselves to be as plugs
Of ditches, where they writhed and shrivelled, killed.

By them had slimy paths been trailed and scraped
Round myriad warts that might be little hills.

From gloom's last dregs these long-strung creatures crept,
And vanished out of dawn down hidden holes.

(And smell came up from those foul openings
As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening.)

The Show.

On dithering feet upgathered, more and more,
Brown strings towards strings of gray, with bristling spines,
All migrants from green fields, intent on mire.

Those that were gray, of more abundant spawns,
Ramped on the rest and ate them and were eaten.

I saw their bitten backs curve, loop, and straighten,
I watched those agonies curl, lift, and flatten.

Whereat, in terror what that sight might mean,
I reeled and shivered earthward like a feather.

And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan.

And He, picking a manner of worm, which half had hid
Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further,
Showed me its feet, the feet of many men,
And the fresh-severed head of it, my head.

STRANGE MEETING.

IT seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall.
With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange, friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said the other, "Save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something has been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,

Strange Meeting.

The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . .

EDITOR'S NOTE—This poem was found among the author's papers. It ends on this strange note.

A TERRE.

(Being the philosophy of many soldiers).

SIT on the bed, I'm blind, and three parts shell,
Be careful ; can't shake hands now ; never shall.
Both arms have mutinied against me,—brutes.
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.

I tried to peg out soldierly,—no use !
One dies of war like any old disease.
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.
I have my medals ?—Discs to make eyes close,
My glorious ribbons ?—Ripped from my own back
In scarlet shreds. [That's for your poetry book.]

A short life and a merry one, my brick !
We used to say we'd hate to live dead-old,—
Yet now . . . I'd willingly be puffy, bald,
And patriotic. Buffers catch from boys
At least the jokes hurled at them. I suppose
Little I'd ever teach a son, but hitting,
Shooting, war, hunting, all the arts of hurting.
Well, that's what I learnt,—that, and making money.

A Terre.

Your fifty years ahead seem none too many ?
Tell me how long I've got ? God ! For one year
To help myself to nothing more than air !
One Spring ! Is one too good to spare, too long ?
Spring wind would work its own way to my lung,
And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.

My servant 's lamed, but listen how he shouts !
When I'm lugged out, he'll still be good for that.
Here in this mummy-case, you know, I've thought
How well I might have swept his floors for ever,
I'd ask no night off when the bustle's over,
Enjoying so the dirt. Who's prejudiced
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn,
Less warm than dust that mixes with arms' tan ?
I'd love to be a sweep, now, black as Town,
Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load ?
O Life, Life, let me breathe,—a dug-out rat !
Not worse than ours the existences rats lead—
Nosing along at night down some safe vat,
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,
And subdivide, and never come to death,
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.
" I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone."

A Terre.

Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned;
The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.
"Pushing up daisies" is their creed you know.
To grain, then, go my fat, to buds my sap,
For all the usefulness there is in soap.
D'you think the Boche will ever stew man-soup?
Some day, no doubt, if . . .
Friend, be very sure
I shall be better off with plants that share
More peaceably the meadow and the shower.
Soft rains will touch me,—as they could touch once,
And nothing but the sun shall make me ware.
Your guns may crash around me. I'll not hear;
Or, if I wince, I shall not know I wince.
Don't take my soul's poor comfort for your jest.
Soldiers may grow a soul when turned to fronds,
But here the thing's best left at home with friends.

My soul's a little grief, grappling your chest,
To climb your throat on sobs; easily chased
On other sighs and wiped by fresher winds.

Carry my crying spirit till it's weaned
To do without what blood remained these wounds.

THE SENTRY.

WE 'D found an old Bosche dug-out, and he knew,
And gave us hell, for shell on frantic shell
Hammered on top, but never quite burst through.
Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime
Kept slush waist high, that rising hour by hour,
Choked up the steps too thick with clay to climb.
What murk of air remained stank old, and sour
With fumes of whizz-bangs, and the smell of men
Who 'd lived there years, and left their curse in the den,
If not their corpses . . .
There we herded from the blast
Of whizz-bangs, but one found our door at last.
Buffeting eyes and breath, snuffing the candles.
And thud! flump! thud! down the steep steps came thumping
And splashing in the flood, deluging muck—
The sentry's body; then his rifle, handles
Of old Bosche bombs, and mud in ruck on ruck
We dredged him up, for killed, until he whined
"O sir, my eyes—I 'm blind—I 'm blind, I 'm blind!"
Coaxing, I held a flame against his lids
And said if he could see the least blurred light
He was not blind; in time he 'd get all right.

The Sentry.

" I can't," he sobbed. Eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids
Watch my dreams still; but I forgot him there
In posting next for duty, and sending a scout
To beg a stretcher somewhere, and floundering about
To other posts under the shrieking air.

* * *

Those other wretches, how they bled and spewed,
And one who would have drowned himself for good,—
I try not to remember these things now.
Let dread hark back for one word only: how
Half-listening to that sentry's moans and jumps,
And the wild chattering of his broken teeth,
Renewed most horribly whenever crumps
Pummelled the roof and slogged the air beneath—
Through the dense din, I say, we heard him shout
" I see your lights! " But ours had long died out.

DISABLED.

HE sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,
—In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his life-time lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.
One time he liked a bloodsmear down his leg,
After the matches carried shoulder-high.

Disabled.

It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join. He wonders why. . . .
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts.

That's why ; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
Aye, that was it, to please to giddy jilts
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg ;
Smiling they wrote his lie ; aged nineteen years.
Germans he scarcely thought of ; all their guilt
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks ; of smart salutes ;
And care of arms ; and leave ; and pay arrears ;
Esprit de corps ; and hints for young recruits.
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him ; and then enquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
To-night he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is ! Why don't they come
And put him into bed ? Why don't they come ?

THE DEAD-BEAT.

HE dropped,—more sullenly than wearily,
Lay stupid like a cod, heavy like meat,
And none of us could kick him to his feet;
Just blinked at my revolver, blearily;
—Didn't appear to know a war was on,
Or see the blasted trench at which he stared.
"I'll do 'em in," he whined, "If this hand's spared,
I'll murder them, I will."

A low voice said,
"It's Blighty, praps, he sees: his pluck's all gone,
Dreaming of all the valiant, that *aren't* dead:
Bold uncles, smiling ministerially;
Maybe his brave young wife, getting her fun
In some new home, improved materially.
It's not these stiffs have crazed him; nor the Hun."

We sent him down at last, out of the way.
Unwounded;—stout lad, too, before that strafe.
Malingering? Stretcher-bearers winked, "Not half!"

Next day I heard the Doc.'s well-whiskied laugh:
"That scum you sent last night soon died. Hooray!"

THE CHANCES.

I MIND as 'ow the night afore that show
Us five got talking,—we was in the know,
" Over the top to-morrer ; boys, we're for it,
First wave we are, first ruddy wave ; that's tore it ! "
" Ah well," says Jimmy,—an' 'e's seen some scrappin'—
There ain't more nor five things as can 'appen ;
Ye get knocked out ; else wounded—bad or cushy ;
Scuppered ; or nowt except yer feeling mushy.

One of us got the knock-out, blown to chops.
T'other was hurt, like, losin' both 'is props.
An one, to use the word of 'ypocrites,
'Ad the misfortoon to be took by Fritz.
Now me, I wasn't scratched, praise God Almighty,
(Though next time please I'll thank 'im for a blighty).
But poor young Jim, 'e's livin' an' 'e's not ;
'E reckoned 'e'd five chances, an' 'e's 'ad ;
'E's wounded, killed, and pris'ner, all the lot.
The ruddy lot all rolled in one. Jim's mad.

ELAN VITAL.

I LAY in the tepid mud
Grey-drab, bubbling here and there with steam,
A cell
Rebellious, derisive of my creator's
Incoherent gropings.
I would be the sport no longer
Of his bovine essays in creation!

The other cells,
Ere they dissolved meekly back
Into inorganism
Tried, at my effrontery
To develop shocked hands
That they might hold them up protesting.
I laughed cells' laughter
And said; "I am life; see me live,"
I died laughing.

I was the creeping things
Slime-tracking the thundered on
Primaeval strata.

Elan Vital.

In delirious will
I, the crashing behemoth
Shouldering through violet nights of fern trees,
Plucked and ate green sappy fronds;
Hungry devils, made
To assimilate weakness, disguised
Themselves as tendencies and laws,
As frost and fire, fulfilling his word.
But I was slimmer,—
Dodged them, tricked them,
Fooled them, camouflaged
Myself from them.

And now
Howl, you winters up the draughty
Sinuous valleys
You storms, burst into tears
On the black dripping schist,
Whine at my windows and doors;
I am man, your master,
The soul of man
The everlasting sperm and the egg,
Springing.

Sometimes yet you snigger when you think
Me dead; you think you have me,

Elan Vital.

Sulphur, calcium, gas and earth
Debauched by home-sickness for
The original mud.
I fool you ; out of my tunnel, oblivion,
Like a flashing express
I rush into birth, terribly shrieking
With laughter.

I am eternal life,
Though you chased and ate me
In the beginning,
Latterly preached at me mortal dogma,
I am the resurrection.
All your scientific
Cosmic apparatus
Cannot dissect me, all your fuss
Misses my point :
For I am a paradox, practical joke
Of the ancient of Days,
Everything and Nothing.

THE SOLDIER'S LAST LOVE.

(In memory of K.S., H.L.I.)

DEAR, I will not let you sleep
I must be selfish once ; I must
Give you a memory to keep
Of my dust
Sharper than a night of lust
Strong as terror, and as deep
I devise this hour and thrust
Off these bestial pangs of sleep.
Take this my body, before I give it
To men's salvation, and birds and plants ;
Be humble and worthy to receive it
As I was humble in esperance
Kissing your feet with the kiss of peace
In the days of peace, when the gravid moon
Inscrutably blessed that year's increase,
And the dew-wet sickle sang to the hone.

The Soldier's Last Love.

Dear, I cannot let you rest
I have grown cruel now ; I have
Smelt the charlock's wind-blown crest
On my grave.
I, as an obedient slave
Wait for death ; grant now at least
Compliance to what I crave—
There are so many hours for rest.
Not I mere flesh, but the territory
Peopled and parked by my soul, unload ;
The northern lights of shivering glory,
Snow-bright peaks like the bones of God ;
Four swift seasons that were my joy,
Stone clean limbs in a purple bay,
All that I loved when I was a boy,
All that I suffered until this day.
Sweet distilled from the flaring broom
Far from the clachan, where bees would come,
Salt from seas at the gunwale broken
Music virginal, yet unspoken,
Spouting through nights when I tossed awake,
Hopeless and aimless for your sake ;
Ships like a king's white mistress preen'd
Swaggering home to the dove-grey port,
Idols to whom I prayed and sinned
Take them, love, for the time is short,

The Soldier's Last Love.

Towering thoughts like hawks of fire
Eager to harry me down the years,—
Prone at the scarlet-rusting wire,
War long vanished in greed and cheers,—
I shall not see, I shall not know,
Impotent, stripped of strength or pain,
O love, and this will be long ago,
Bear with me now, this once again.
  Dear, I cannot let you see
  How the night is almost gone
  Sliding back inexorably;
  Our communion
  Limb from limb, and bone from bone
  Rend; and rest your tired body
  All to-day, while I put on
  Death's appalling chastity.

EXPERIENCE.

WHO have the straight direction
Routine provides, and counts upon
Each day's mechanic sequence, able
At barrack square or office table
To serve, as engines, to the rule,
Might pass for strict, and strong, and dull.
One seeing such might never guess
At aught but patient heedfulness.
This very lasting monotone
Which soaks alike in mind and bone
Adds every day layer upon layer
As a long discipline of prayer
Leads up ; till some time unawares
The curtain of dimension tears,
Worn thin by the continuous
Insistence. Then, by each man's use
Unknown desire against him breaks
Until his inner temple shakes.

Experience.

It may be that some prurient
Insects from hell's corners are sent
And men will marvel how, though long
In habit temperate and strong
One of them in obscene disaster
Proves some abhorrent thing his master.
Or one who ever sought, may hap
Upon the jewel in heaven's lap
And hear the carillons of laughter
Flung back from heaven's roof and rafter,
To his tired column on the road
The shining silver hands of God
Will stretch from over some white cloud,
And he may hear both sweet and loud
The singing madness of the Lord,
Which with its terrible accord
Breaks this man's heart, and lets his brain
Rock to the time and ring again.
Though none may see him changed, he may
Look further than the light of day
And see those many, who, not human
Yet with the forms of man and woman
Yet like the rocks, yet like the trees
And the green principalities
Of meadows, and the slashing snow
That from the north wind does go,

Are full of sweet and dangerous fire
Which he may bitterly desire ;
Things visible to ribbons torn,
The world of her known nature shorn
And naked the spirits of her
Crying with a trumpet's stir.
Though for less time his seeing last
Than while a lightning flickers past
He knows what he has seen, and keeps
A double seal upon his lips.

NEW SAINTS.

CHRIST Communist, accept these latest
Saints following the antique way,
Liebknecht, who scorned kings and the greatest,
And Rosa, now grown "mystica."

His flesh was parted, a new mass
You living in its mutilation
While in the ditch it came to pass
She had her last and Seventh Station.

The generous roses of her blood
Now splash the fields of paradise
That soaked and mottled all the road,
And he is lovely in God's eyes.

Let labourers build a church to shew
The history of their clean emprise
Whom, at your dictates, we will now
Beatify, then canonise.

ÜBER ALLEN GIPFELN IST RUH.

IN strangely laminated streaks and layers
Of terra-cotta, sulphur, arsenic,
Crossed by long rays, like steam of amber shaped
Polygonal, the inexorable sun
Drops.
And the soap magnate, Sir Bonian Bogg,
Smokes in his long verandah, as the shadow
Of the great cedar lengthens on the lawn,
He watches how all heaven does pulsate
And run and melt, and crystallise into colour.
"Perfect!" he whispers, "Perfect!" as a tower
Of vitrine scarlet in fantastic cloud
Wanes: and he long enjoys its agony.

The hands in his soap-boiling factory
Do not observe the sun. And if they did
They would not be impressed. A factory hand
With soul enough to catch his breath at sunsets
Has soul enough to dream of liberty.
Wherefore the sensible Sir Bonian Bogg
Selects employees without any souls.

A DARK CHURCH.

"LORDS spiritual, in your state
Of black copes and mitres great,
What do you keep your church within?

"More old than who did not begin,
More cunning than the child of sin,
The unclean thing beneath the skin.

"Have you not in your sanctuary
The lamp that shews God's heart is merry?"

"We have a dark temple, and do
Not let the light come rending through."

"Then say, how many gods have you?"

"We worship two.
The first is measured by a span.
The second is man and not man.
A spring that rises black and thick,
And one that was born lunatic."

MATERIALISM: OR PASTOR TAKES THE RESTAURANT CAR FOR HEAVEN.

UPON sharp floods of noise, there glide
The red-brick houses, float, collide

With aspidestras, trains on steel
That lead us not to what we feel.

Hot glassy light fills up the gloom
As water an aquarium,

All mirror-bright; beneath this seen
Our faces coloured by its sheen

Seem objects under water, bent
By each bright-hued advertisement

Whose words are stamped upon our skin
As though the heat had burnt it in.

The jolting of the train that made
All objects coloured bars of shade

Materialism: or Pastor takes the Restaurant Car.

Projects them sideways till they split
Splinters from eyeballs as they flit.

Down endless tubes of throats we squeeze
Our words, lymphatic paint to please

Our sense of neatness, neutralize
The overtint and oversize.

I think it true that heaven should be
A narrow train for you and me,

Where we perpetually must haunt
The oblique-moving restaurant

And feed on foods of other minds
Behind the hot and dusty blinds.

NINE BUCOLIC POEMS.

EDITH SITWELL.

I.

WHAT THE GOOSEGIRL SAID ABOUT THE DEAN.

To W. T. Walton.

TURN again, turn again,
Goose Clothilda, Goosie Jane!

Bright wooden waves of people creak
From houses built with coloured straws
Of heat; Dean Pappus' long nose snores
Harsh as a hautbois, marshy-weak.

The wooden waves of people creak
Through the fields all water-sleek

And in among the straws of light
Those bumpkin hautbois-sounds take flight

What the Goosegirl said about the Dean.

Whence he lies snoring like the moon
Clownish-white all afternoon

Beneath the trees' arsenical
Sharp woodwind tunes; heretical—

Blown like the wind's mane
(Creaking woodenly again)

His wandering thoughts escape like geese
Till he, their gooseherd, sets up chase
While clouds of wool join the bright race
For scattered old simplicities.

II.

THE GIRL WITH THE LINT-WHITE LOCKS.

To Alvaro Guevara.

THE bright-striped wooden fields are edged
With foolish cock-crow trees scarce fledged—

The trees that spin like tops, all weathers,
(As strange birds ruffle glassy feathers).

My hair is white as flocks of geese
And water hisses out of this

And when the late sun burns my cheek
Till it is pink as apples sleek

I wander in the fields and know
Why kings do squander pennies so—

Lest they at last should weight their eyes!
But beggars' ragged minds, more wise,

The Girl with the Lint-White Locks.

Know without flesh we cannot see—
And so they hoard stupidity

(The dull ancestral memory
That is their only property).

They laugh to see the spring fields edged
With noisy cock-crow trees scarce fledged

And flowers that grunt to feel their eyes
Made clear with sight's finalities!

III.

BY CANDLELIGHT.

To Sacheverell, the Author of "Bird Actors."

HOUSES red as flower of bean,
Flickering leaves and shadows lean!
Pantalone like a parrot
Sat and grumbled in the garret,
Sat and growled and grumbled till
Moon upon the window-sill
Like a red geranium
Scented his bald cranium.
Said Brighella, meaning well:
"Pack your box and—go to Hell!
Heat will cure your rheumatism!"
Silence crowned this optimism.—
Not a sound and not a wail . . .
But the fire (lush leafy vale)
Watched the angry feathers fly . . .
Pantalone 'gan to cry—
Could not, *would* not, pack his box!
Shadows (curtseying hens and cocks)
Pecking in the attic gloom
Tried to smother his tail plume—
Till a cock's comb candle-flame
Crowing loudly, died. Dawn came.

IV.

VARIATIONS ON AN OLD NURSERY RHYME.

THE King of China's daughter
So beautiful to see
With her face like yellow water left
Her nutmeg tree:
Her little rope for skipping
She kissed and gave it me
Made of painted notes of singing-birds
Among the fields of tea.
I skipped across the nutmeg grove
I skipped across the sea:
But neither sun nor moon, my dear
Has yet caught me.

V.

SERENADE BERGAMASQUE.

THE tremulous gold of stars within your hair
Are yellow bees flown from the hive of night
Finding the blossom of your eyes more fair
Than all the pale flowers folded from the light:
Then Sweet, awake, and ope your dreaming eyes
Ere those bright bees have flown and darkness dies.

VI.

CLOWN'S HOUSES.

BENEATH the flat and paper sky,
The sun, a demon's eye,
Glowed through the air, that mask of glass;
All wand'ring sounds that pass

Seemed out of tune, as if the light
Were fiddle-strings pulled tight.
The market square with spire and bell
Clanged out the hour in Hell;

The busy chatter of the heat
Shrilled like a parokeet;
And shudd'ring at the noonday light,
The dust lay dead and white

As powder on a mummy's face,
Or fawned with simian grace
Round booths with many a hard bright toy
And wooden brittle joy:

Clown's Houses.

The cap and bells of Time the Clown
That, jangling, whistled down
Young cherubs hidden in the guise
Of every bird that flies;

And star-bright masks for youth to wear
Lest any dream that fare
—Bright pilgrim—past our ken, should see
Hints of Reality.

Upon the sharp-set grass, shrill-green
Tall trees like rattles lean,
And jangle sharp and dizzily;
But when night falls they sigh

Till Pierrot moon steals slyly in,
His face more white than sin
Black-masked, and with cool touch lays bare
Each cherry, plum, and pear.

Then underneath the veilèd eyes
Of houses, darkness lies.
Tall houses; like a hopeless prayer
They cleave the sly dumb air;

Clown's Houses.

Blind are those houses, paper-thin;
Old shadows hid therein
With sly and crazy movements creep
Like marionettes and weep.

Tall windows show Infinity;
And, hard reality,
The candles weep and pry and dance
Like lives mocked at by Chance.

The rooms are vast as sleep within;
When once I ventured in,
Chill Silence like a surging sea
Slowly enveloped me.

VII.

MISS NETTYBUN AND THE SATYR'S CHILD.

AS underneath the trees I pass
Through emerald shade on hot soft grass,
Petunia faces glowing-hued
With heat cast shadows hard and crude
Green-velvety as leaves, and small
Fine hairs like grass pierce through them all.
But these are all asleep,—asleep,
As through the schoolroom door I creep
In search of you—for you evade
All the advances I have made.
Come, Horace, you must take my hand—
This sulking state I will not stand!
But you shall feed on strawberry jam
At tea-time, if you cease to slam
The doors that open on our sense
Through which I slipped to drag you hence.

VIII.

QUEEN VENUS AND THE CHOIR-BOY.

To Naomi Royde-Smith.

THE apples grow like silver trumps
That red-cheeked fair-haired angels blow—
So clear their juice; on trees in clumps
Feathered as any bird, they grow.

A lady stood amid these crops—
Her voice was like a blue or pink
Glass window full of lollipops;
Her words were very strange, I think:

"Prince Paris, too, a fair-haired boy
Plucked me an apple from dark trees;
Since when, their smoothness makes my joy;
If you will pluck me one of these

I'll kiss you like a golden wind
As clear as any apples be."
And now she haunts my singing mind—
And oh, she will not set me free!

IX.

"TOURNEZ, TOURNEZ, BON CHEVAUX DE BOIS."

TURN, turn again,
Ape's blood in each vein!
The people that pass
Seem castles of glass,
The old and the good
Giraffes of blue wood,
The soldier, the nurse,
Wooden face and a curse,
Are shadowed with plumage
Like birds, by the gloomage.
Blond hair like a clown's
The music floats, drowns
The creaking of ropes,
The breaking of hopes.
The wheezing, the old,
Like harmoniums scold.

" Tournez, Tournez, Bon Chevaux De Bois."

Go to Babylon, Rome,
The brain-cells called home,
The grave, new Jerusalem,
Wrinkled Methusalem!
From our floating hair
Derived the first fair
And queer inspiration
Of music—the nation
Of bright-plumèd trees
And harpy-shrill breeze

* * *

Turn, turn again,
Ape's blood in each vein!

PRESS NOTICES.

THE ATHENAEUM.

We are all relieved from a certain tension, as at the accession of Charles II.

THE ATHENAEUM.

(In a full page review entitled the 'Post Georgians.')

'Wheels' qua anthology, has assuredly made an impression from the start. . . . It indicated that an hour had struck, a mode had passed, that a new fashion had arrived. . . . So the daffodil and the rainbow and the cuckoo were to be put away, and the Harlequinades of the harlotry players and the Columbines of Verlaine and Symons to be had out again. We are all relieved from a certain tension, as at the accession of Charles II. . . . 'Wheels' marked a change in fashion. *Vers libre* and Cubism already existed, but 'Wheels' at least acknowledged the fact; it showed a willingness to experiment, a tolerance of various emotions, and a complete indifference to simplicity. This last item is most important; for the last literary mode had been wholly corrupted by simplicity. Great simplicity is only won by an intense moment or by years of intelligent effort, or by both. It represents one of the most arduous conquests of the human spirit: the triumph of feeling and thought over the natural sin of language. . . . Simplicity is merely a means, a means of direct contact. It is a virtue of expression. Simplicity was not hard won by the Georgians, it was given them by the fairy, and so, securely simple in their hearts, they neglected the more pharisaical virtue of simplicity in expression. 'Wheels,' by contrast, has stood on the side of intelligence.

It recognised that there are some pretty complicated feelings in life which are worth a little pains to express. . . .

Mr. Huxley is one of the few younger poets who have written a few interesting poems which express very well feelings characteristic of adolescence. . . . Mr. Osbert Sitwell's 'Youth and Age' and 'This Generation' are much better stuff than that of the war poets. In Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell's best poems there has always been an insight, a unit of vision. . . . He is capable of something exceptional, to be won by infinite labour. . . . Miss Edith Sitwell's coloured furniture is so cleverly done, at times, that we wonder whether she is not fully justified in doing nothing else. (Singerie) is much better done than 'Goblin Market.' Miss Sitwell can be depended upon, in work like this, never to be ridiculous. She is unusual among contemporaries in that she cannot fall into vulgarity or cheapness.

THE SATURDAY REVIEW.

(In a leading Article.)

The Sitwell family, Mr. Huxley, Miss Tree and Mr. Vines are very tiresome young people, but they share this quality with Shelley and the young Swinburne. They excite annoyance, and a very good thing too. It is the business of genius, particularly of genius not yet arrived, to worry the middle sort. Genius, let it be remembered, just outruns Bolshevism. It is as scornful of the new sham as of the old, and in our view Miss Sitwell's 'Singerie' and Mr. Huxley with his 'Ventre à terre, head in air, your centuars are your only poets, their hoofs strike sparks from the flints And they see both very near and immensely far,' get there before Lenin. They have found the new thing first, and they are making the new world before the Red Hand has had a chance to break the old one. . . .

Miss Tree is venomously alive, and Mr. Vines touches something like the truth. (Edith Sitwell is a) person of

genius. The Sitwell brothers can do Beaumont and Fletcher to the life after death, and change them to modern wonder.

THE NATION.

It behoves the writers of 'Wheels' to remember that nine days do not last for ever, and that we now look for something more than brilliance, talent, waywardness, Light Brigade Charges against poetic conventions and skittles from them. . . . Miss Edith Sitwell's passionate, sombre spirit can use any formula it chooses, any idiom or wording, from gaudy melon flowers to ginger-beer bottles, without wasting its breath.

THE SATURDAY WESTMINSTER GAZETTE.

. . . They are beginning to show collective individuality . . . Miss Edith Sitwell . . . has come to possess a real style. She has invented a rushing couplet into which she crams 'the giddy sun's kaleidescope.' Her verses read like a parable of something seen by Beardsley and coloured by Gauquin.

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT.

This opens—in the second poem called 'Clavichords,' by Osbert Sitwell, with a composition in free metre of such true and delicate beauty that one follows it up greedily for further discoveries—but without much satisfaction. . . . Arnold James . . . has ideas which he can hammer out into striking expression.

FROM THE SUNDAY TIMES.

Mr. Norman Roe (in his book, entitled *Sonnets of Old Things*) is . . . literary. Every one of his charming poems can be read with pleasure. (Here) is an example of Mr. Roe's honest sentiment :—

I have a little landmark where
Baby trod,
A full six inches up the stair—
Do you think that God
Was there
To watch my baby when she trod
The bottom stair?

We think it quite likely.

The same honesty of sentiment cannot very well be credited to the neurotic young men and women who have been responsible for 'Wheels.' . . . I'm not out to provide Miss Sitwell with a tiara on the cheap.

FROM A (OR THE) COMMON CAUSE.

The title "Wheels" does suggest progress, and for this reason it is appropriate, not because young poets and poetasters of both sexes do necessarily make progression in their work, but because the lively reader perpetually hopes that they have done so. . . . Edith Sitwell remains stationary. . . . It is as though she had polished and chipped and varnished all depth and subtlety away; her obscurity is not in the least suggestive.

Open Letter from the Editor of Wheels to Miss Jones of A (or The) Common Cause.

DEAR MISS JONES

(if you will pardon the expression),

Though the above is unsigned, I detect in it the traces, less of the cloven hoof than of a certain wooden head. I can quite understand your taking a rooted dislike to skilled technique in poetry, but may I suggest that the loss of subtlety is not always (as is the case with my poems) the result of polish. I will quote an instance to prove the reverse of your argument, —placing together Albert Samain's polished and technically perfect poem, "L'Indifferent," and your translation of the same.

L'Indifferent. *By Albert Samain.*

Dans le parc vapoureux où l'heure s'énamoure,
Les robes de satin et les sveltes manteaux
Le mèlent, reflétés au ciel calme des eaux,
Et c'est la fin d'un soir infini qu'on savoure.

* * * *

L'Indifférent, oh ! las d'Agnès ou de Lucile,
Sur la scène, d'un geste adorable et gracile,
Du bout de ses doigts fins séme un peu de son cœur.

Translation by Miss Jones.

Down in the park grown vaporous and wide
The long cloaks and the satin dresses make
Mingled reflections in the unruffled lake,
And nostrils breathe the infinite eventide.

* * * *

The Indifferent One, weary of gentle friends,
Scatters abroad from delicate finger-ends,
And gracefully, a little of his heart.

I like you personally, Miss Jones, so I prefer to draw a veil over the rest of this painful scene, which the magic of your touch has converted from a Fête Galante into a family party at Lyons' Popular. Frankly, darling, what a stinker! Don't do it ever again, *please*, Miss Jones! Poetasters indeed!

Believe me, in spite of this little rift in the lute,

Yours faithfully,

THE EDITOR OF *WHEELS*.

THE PIONEER.

Mr. Aldous Huxley's style is individual, at times attaining great heights. Mr. Osbert Sitwell's sylvan 'Song of the Fauns' might almost have been taken from a Jacobean masque, and there are passages that haunt one in the old way of fine poetry. Mr. Arnold James' two poems, 'The Poet's Task,' and 'Now from light of the sun,—My eyes are hidden,' are especially noteworthy, and of a singular beauty. They have the manner of great poetry . . . the old lure of exquisite cadences, the fine phrase, the fine thought, the sincerity and simplicity essential to good art. The greatest step forward, however, is taken by Mr. Sherard Vines. His real power and extraordinary command of language and rhythm are nobly used in the splendid and militant 'Sunrise.' This, and the equally fine poem 'The Prophet,' have a speed and tempestuous quality almost Swinburnian.

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Conceived in morbid eccentricity and executed in fierce factitious gloom.—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

We have no doubt whatever that, fifty years hence, the publication of 'Wheels' will be remembered as a notable event in the inner history of English Literature.—*Morning Post.*

Aldous Huxley. *THE BURNING WHEEL.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Without any doubt an original poet.—*The Nation.*

Edith Sitwell. *THE MOTHER, AND OTHER POEMS.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

In all these poems one thing is clear. They come from within. Miss Sitwell does not describe, she lives in her verse. This very little therefore points a long way.—*The Times.*

Edith and Osbert Sitwell. *20TH CENTURY HARLEQUINADE.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Every pretty woman carries a vanity bag into which she puts all her most cherished possessions, from a passionate letter from Flanders to a dinky little pink stick of lip-salve. When writers of verses are happy enough to collar publishers they put all the most precious possessions of their hearts into their books—which are vanity bags. . . . [This] vanity bag [is] not so pretty.—*The New Witness.*

Osbert Sitwell's tremendous "Babel."—*The Morning Post.*

E. Wyndham Tennant. *WORPLE FLIT AND OTHER POEMS.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Mr. Tennant has an unclouded vision and a blessed gift of direct speech.—*The Glasgow Herald.*

Iris Tree. *POEMS.* Privately printed.

Sherard Vines. *THE TWO WORLDS.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

An extremely vivid and charming poet.—*The Nation.*

Sacheverell Sitwell. *THE PEOPLE'S PALACE.*

This is the most 'advanced' poetry we have had so far; 'advanced' in that it is founded on a theory probably new to this country.—Robert Nichols in *The New Witness.*

We have attributed more to Mr. Sitwell than to any poet of quite his generation. We require of him only ten years of toil.—T. S. Eliot in *The Egoist.*

'The Mayor of Murcia' is almost unreadable for dullness. —Jones (Miss Topsy) in *A* (or *The*) *Common Cause.*

The word '*dire*' shows real observation and imagination. It illuminates—it is the word one might have thought of and didn't.—Jones (Miss) in *A* (or *The*) *Common Cause.* [Editor's Note.—Hoity-toity, Topsy Jones!]

OUR STYLISTS.

The People's Palace purports to be a collection of verse by Sacheverell Sitwell. Its sheer inanity is beyond description. The audacity of wasting precious paper, to say nothing of printing ink, on such unadulterated drivel take *(sic)* one's breath away.—*The World.* [Editor's Note.—A society paper, I *believe.*]

Exhibits all the characteristic traits of Mr. Sitwell's rhyming (!); to wit, a rather tortuous and alembicated diction, profusely interspersed with an intricate preciosity of imagery, and far-fetched ideas clothed in elaborate language.—*The Aberdeen Daily Journal.*

Aldous Huxley. *THE DEFEAT OF YOUTH.*

Published by B. H. Blackwell.

The best thing in Mr. Huxley's new volume is . . . *The Defeat of Youth.* The later poems in the book belong to his . . . subjective-eccentric period wherein . . . lies are notable epigrammatists.

Love songs . . . are hardly in Mr. Huxley's line, and when they do occur it sounds like the 'love-gambols of the blob.'—*The Nation.*

Mr. Huxley is a poet whom it is as difficult to praise outright as it is to overlook him altogether.

Exceedingly good translation of *L'Après midi d'un Faune.*

[Almost all the reviewers like this translation.]

If Mr. Huxley could abandon his search for the rarer emotions for rareness sake, and if he could be a little less ingenious all round he would be a better poet.—*Land and Water.*

Mr. Huxley's great merit is that he does not attempt to conceal his sophistication. His great defect is that the degree of his sophistication is rather overwhelming.

His verse is truly elegant. Its rhythms are good, it is incisely phrased, it is devoid of clichés, it is often ironically witty and often originally and agreeably coloured.

He is too self-conscious, too vividly aware that nearly everything has been done already.

It would be possible to demonstrate his power to write beautifully and well from almost any page in his volume.—*The New Statesman.*

Scholarly and acceptable verse.—*The Literary World.*

Mr. Huxley is a poet who focuses his mind without stint into verse, a process which has its dangers; but his mind is so richly stored and so quickly receptive that the result never lacks interest.

It is clear that any idea or emotion that comes to him has the best possible chance of surviving beautifully.—*The Times.*

Wit is the delightfully firm ground beneath all Mr. Huxley's poems.

We feel that he knows where he is going, even when he goes with as little grace as a poodle on its hind legs in pursuit of a biscuit.

The poems in which he seems to us to achieve keen beauty are *The Elms*, *Inspiration*, and *Out of the Window.—The Athenæum.*

. . . Admirable qualities of rhythm, diction, imagery, and frequently, wit; but the emotions of which these are the vehicles are frequently very tenuous and more subtle than profound.—*The Westminster Gazette.*

His response and reaction to the appeal of loneliness, the significance of small contacts, and idle feelings, the implications of daily life, are sure and instant.—*The Common Cause.*

Edith Sitwell. *CLOWN'S HOUSES.*

Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Miss Sitwell's verses may remind some people of the Italian Comedy seen through a distorting mirror. . . . The Italian Comedy is a little formula that will contain a very large bulk of life, and . . . Miss Sitwell's performing matter has mind behind it. We convolute and spiralize, but somebody has hold of the strings. . . . Her method has to a certain extent been a cockshy for the trumpery reviewer, but inasmuch as she does not use it either perversely or to exploit her personality, we rather admire her courage than deprecate the chosen vessel of its wrath.—*The Nation.*

If by a chance, which is not so improbable as appears, Miss Sitwell's teapot reminded her first of the Tower of London and then of Joan of Arc, she would say so without hesitation or consistency. . . . For the most part, we believe that she is trying her best to be honest with her own conceptions, and, that being so, she is of course perfectly right not to care whether they appear outlandish.—*The Times Literary Supplement.*

She is a poet for whose poetry the taste must emphatically be acquired. What seemed like imaginative madness shows on closer acquaintance much method.—*The Oxford Chronicle.*

Miss Sitwell can writes Fêtes Galantes and perverted nursery rhymes as well as any poet alive.—*New Statesman.*

Fire is Miss Sitwell's element.—*Everyman.*

Miss Sitwell is best and most herself when she dances a gracefully grotesque *pas seul* of absurdities,—using rhyme, as M. Duhamel puts it, 'pour taper du talon les pas d'une petite danse qui o'en accomode,' and 'pour mettre des talons rouges dans une fête galante.'—*The Saturday Westminster Gazette.*

Miss Sitwell is in danger of being, as they say in the nursery, 'too clever by half.' . . . Her particular gift is for the making of a kind of nonsense rhyme that is as gay and pretty and inconsequent as the lights of a fair. The world as she describes it, indeed, is more like a flower-show in a gale or a circus when the tent-pole breaks—a big haphazard pitching and tossing of marquees—than part of a mathematically punctual universe.—*The Athenæum.*

Her whole book has in it a nightmare quality of ugliness. We wonder what is Miss Sitwell's conception of the true function of Poetry ?—*Cambridge Review.* [*Note.*—The Editor of '*Wheels*' is always pleased to answer any question as courteousiy put as the above. Miss Sitwell's conception of the True Function of Poetry is the same, 'Little Arthur,' as her conception of the True Function of Space, Eternity, the Will to Be, the Daily Mail, or any other eternal verity.]

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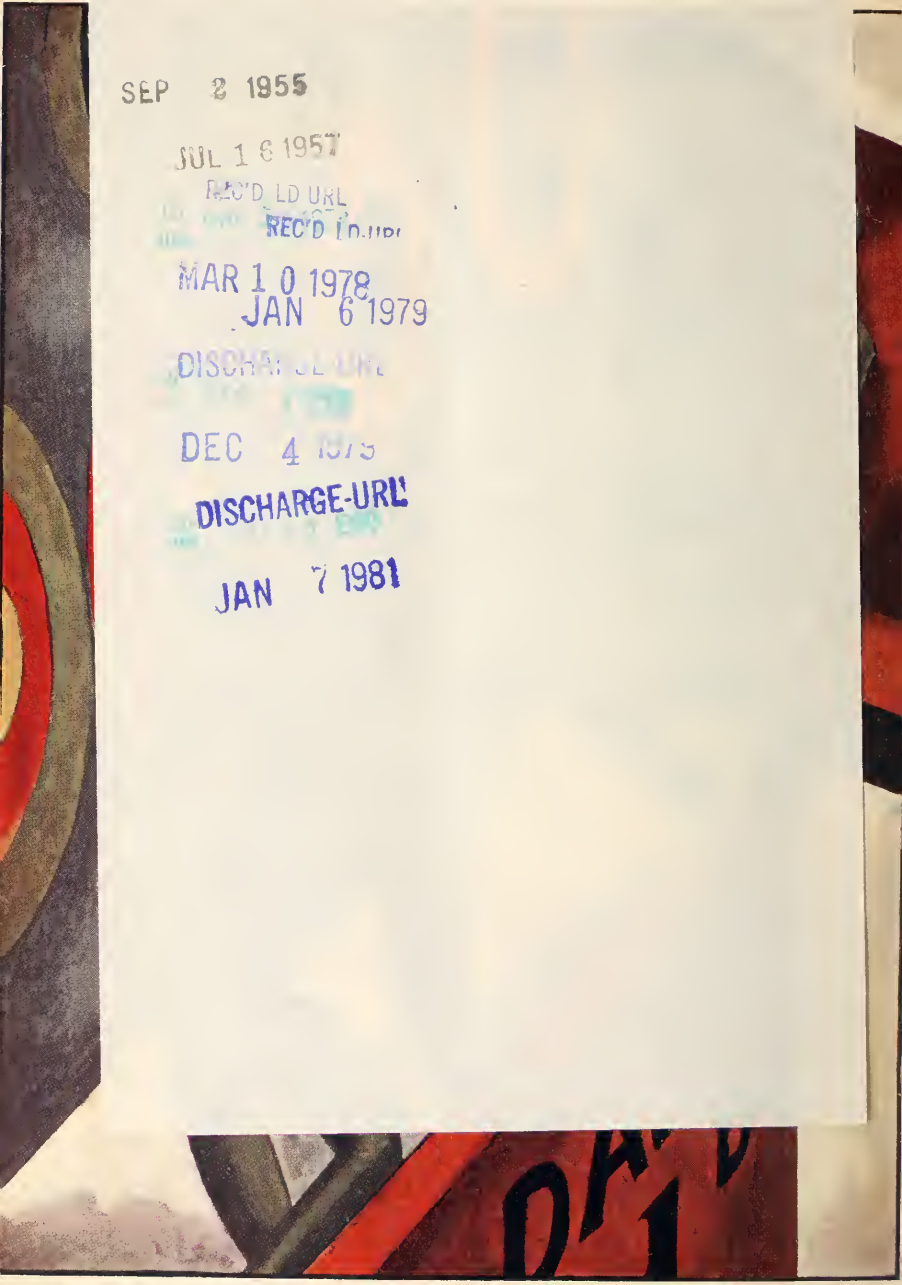

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